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ABSTRACT

This publication is intended to help parents in Kansas communities plan for the transition of young children with special needs from the Infant-Toddler Services program to Early Childhood Special Education Services and/or other community services. Information is provided on the seven-step process: (1) planning ahead; (2) the transition meeting; (3) evaluation; (4) staffing; (5) getting ready for the Individualized Education Program/Individualized Family Service Plan (IEP/IFSP) meeting; (6) participating in the IEP/IFSP meeting; and (7) putting the IEP/IFSP into action. Information in each section generally includes questions to consider, important people to contact, action steps, and a checklist. A final section summarizes what the law says about parental rights in the areas of written consent, parent participation, educational evaluation, records, confidentiality of information, and due process. (DB)

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Step Ahead at Age 3

- Planning Ahead
- Transition Meeting
- Evaluation
- Staffing
- Preparing for the IEP
- IEP/IFSP Meeting
- Putting the IEP/IFSP into Action

On or near the third birthday, a child STEPS AHEAD from Infant-Toddler Services to Early Childhood Special Education services and/or other community services.

Moving from program to program is called transition. Families and service providers walk through this transition together, one step at a time.

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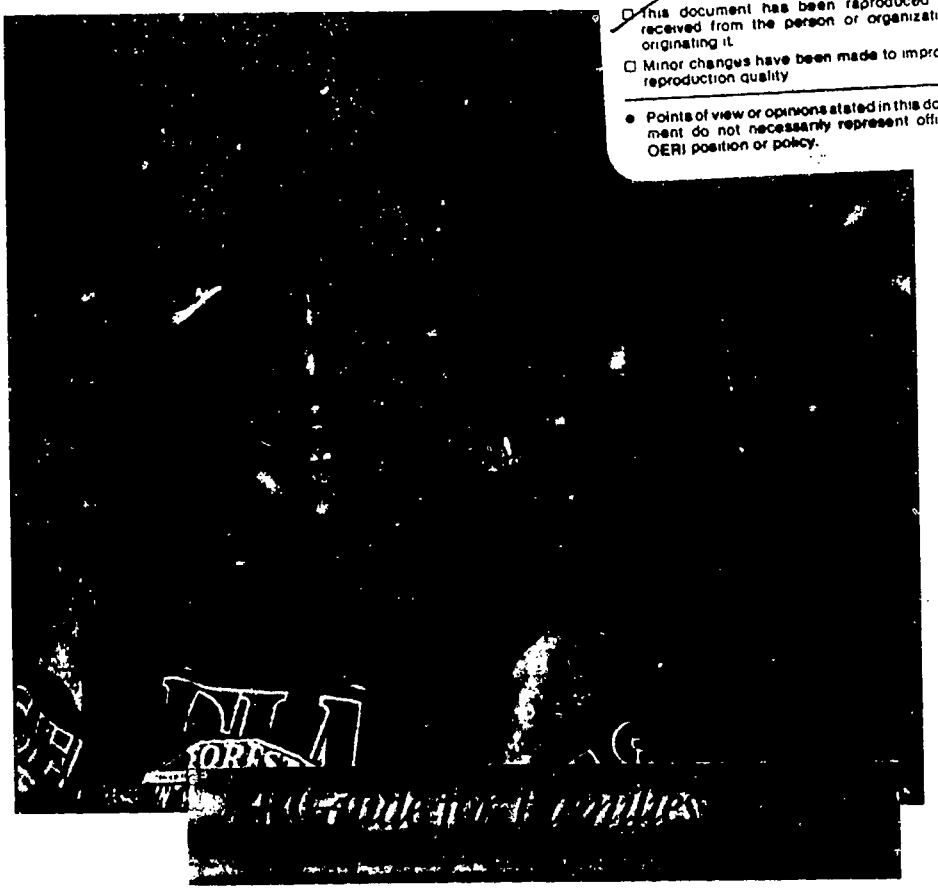

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Step 1: Planning Ahead

Transitions are natural events for all children and their families. Successful transitions begin as people think about the future, plan ahead and work together.

As your child nears age 3, he or she will transition from Infant-Toddler Services to Early Childhood Special Education, Head Start or other services. Legally, these are different programs. This fact guides some of the actions that must be taken. This Family Guide is a tool to assist you, and others who care about your child, to plan together to make wise decisions for your child. Other resources may also be helpful as you begin to think about transition: friends who have young children, local parent organizations, a family with a child slightly older than yours or Families Together, Inc. (Kansas' parent training and information center, 1-800-264-6343).

Some questions to consider:

What do we hope for our child?

What does our child need — now — to grow and develop?

Who do we want our child to play and learn with?

Where would our child be if he or she didn't have a developmental delay or disability?

"I think parents have been searching for a road map to help us decipher 'the system.' The task is extremely complex."

Overland Park mother

Important People and Phone Numbers for My Child's Transition

Family Service Coordinator

_____

_____

Early Childhood Special Education

_____

_____

Families Together, Inc., Parent Information and Training Center

1-800-264-6343

Others

_____

_____

_____

_____

To plan ahead...

Our family will —

- Talk about transition with our family service coordinator
- Decide how actively we wish to be involved in the planning process
- Decide if we want a friend or relative to participate in transition planning meetings with us
- Write a transition outcome for our IFSP (Individualized Family Service Plan)
- Consider talking with friends or other community resources to learn about transition
- Give written permission to Infant-Toddler Services to refer our child to Early Childhood Special Education

Infant-Toddler Services staff will —

- Offer our family information about transition and related community resources
- Begin the transition planning process by including transition in our IFSP
- Seek permission from the family to refer our child to Early Childhood Special Education
- Schedule a transition planning meeting with our family and Early Childhood Special Education staff at least 90 days before our child's third birthday

Early Childhood Special Education staff will —

- Receive the referral from Infant-Toddler Services
- Work together with our family and Infant-Toddler Services staff on transition planning.
- Prepare to share information with our family about the evaluation process, determination of eligibility for Early Childhood Special Education services and placement opportunities

"I'm really excited about this transition. It will be so wonderful for Casey to make new friends. He's ready for some new challenges. This is an important time for us."

Wichita parent

- ❑ The general timeline and some individual outcomes for the transition were written in the IFSP.
- ❑ Community resources have been found.
- ❑ The transition meeting has been scheduled.

Step 2: Transition Meeting

The transition meeting is the time when you and your team from Infant-Toddler Services and Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) meet to develop your child's transition plan. This plan outlines the steps that your family and the two service programs will follow over the next months to help make your child's transition smooth and pleasant. The transition meeting occurs at least three months before your child's third birthday. If the birthday is in the summer or September, the transition meeting will occur in the spring to allow time for plans to be in place before the school year begins.

Some Questions To Ask at the Transition Meeting

- How will our child's eligibility for Early Childhood Special Education be determined?
- What additional testing will be done?
- Who can we call if we have questions?
- What are the different ways services can be provided?
- If we choose for our child to attend preschool or Head Start, how will therapy and other services be provided?
- Who do we need to contact if we want to visit a program or classroom?
- When are good times for us to visit?
- When is the right time for our child to visit the classroom?
- When will we meet next to decide on the services?

Tips for Preschool Visits

- Make an appointment. Visit only at the time scheduled.
- Upon arrival, check in at the office.
- Ask the teacher where to sit and whether to interact with the children.
- Write down questions to ask the teacher later.
- Schedule a time to talk with the teacher at the end of your visit or at a later time. You may want to talk with the teacher privately about your child.
- Ask the teacher for suggestions to help ease your child into school.

Who will attend the transition meeting?

Family

Friends or relatives invited by the family

Infant-Toddler Services staff

Early Childhood Special Education staff

When visiting a preschool program...

...it's helpful to picture your child as part of the class. Consider these questions:

- Do the children appear to be happy?
- Are they actively involved with materials and with each other?
- Does this program appear to match the way my child learns?
- How is communication encouraged?
- Does this program appear to match our family's values and respect our ethnic traditions?
- Would our child be in this preschool if he or she did not have a developmental delay or disability?
- How are families involved?
- What is the ratio of adults to children in this program?
- Is the travel time from our home to the center reasonable for a young child?

At the Transition Meeting...

Our family will —

- Share our hopes for our child
- Review parental rights information
- Ask questions about anything that is unclear
- Sign consent form for release of records from Infant-Toddler Services to the school district that sponsors Early Childhood Special Education services
- Sign consent form for evaluation to determine whether our child is eligible for Early Childhood Special Education
- Agree to participate in the transition planning process at the level that feels comfortable for us
- Make sure the transition plan includes options that help realize our dreams for our child

Infant-Toddler Services staff will —

- Host the transition meeting
- Share information as requested by our family
- Participate actively in transition planning
- Write the transition plan and timeline that are decided at the meeting

Early Childhood Special Education staff will —

- Receive our family's written consent for release of records
- Receive our family's written consent for evaluation
- Explain parental rights in special education and answer questions about our rights
- Discuss possible services and places where they might be provided
- Consider our family's concerns about the transition
- Participate actively in transition planning

Although some families choose not to participate in transition planning, many families become very involved in planning: visiting possible preschools and Head Start, talking with teachers and therapists, asking questions to understand parental rights described in the laws, and observing and learning about the skills tested in the evaluation. You, as the parent, have the right to decide how much you will participate in your child's transition planning.

Many parents like to visit preschools, Head Start, and child care centers where Early Childhood Special Education might be provided. Here is a place to list such programs in your community.

Program	Address	Phone

When I went to visit, I could see right away what fun all the children were having. I wanted my son to be part of that.

Salina mother

Checklist

- ❑ Transition meeting was held with our family, Infant-Toddler Services and Early Childhood Special Education staff.
- ❑ Parents' rights in special education were explained.
- ❑ A transition timeline was developed.
- ❑ A transition plan was agreed to by all of those attending.
- ❑ Options for preschool services were listed.
- ❑ We signed consent for release of records.
- ❑ We signed consent for evaluation.

Step 3: Evaluation

Every child has a personal set of talents and needs. In order to provide an education that fits your child, it is important for him or her to be evaluated. Information from the evaluation will be used to make decisions that will help your child receive needed educational services.

The law (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) requires that each child who has been referred to Early Childhood Special Education be evaluated to find out whether he or she is eligible to receive special services. Your written permission must be received before the evaluation can occur. The evaluation must be completed within 40 school days after the referral. If your child becomes eligible for special education services, information from the evaluation will also be used to develop educational goals.

Some of the information needed for the evaluation may come from a review of your child's records in Infant-Toddler Services. New information will come from additional informal and formal assessments. Some of the information will be gathered in natural, play-like situations. Other sources may be tests with required activities.

Each of the professionals who work together to do the evaluation specializes in a different aspect of child development. A "multidisciplinary team" is formed by you and the professionals.

Dates To Remember for Evaluation

Date	Time	Place	Information To Bring

Persons Who Will Be Evaluating My Child (Multidisciplinary Team)

Name	Area of Specialty	Phone

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During the Evaluation Process...

Our family will —

- Share with the team what we feel is important about our child and family
- Try to schedule evaluation activities at our child's best time, perhaps mornings or after naps
- Ask questions about the evaluation

Infant-Toddler Services staff will —

- Share records and testing information on file
- Invite Early Childhood Special Education staff to see our child in Infant-Toddler Services
- Answer questions our family and the Early Childhood Special Education team may have

Early Childhood Special Education staff will —

- Explain and plan the evaluation with our family
- Locate records and testing information already on file
- Decide what new information is needed
- Provide a team to evaluate our child
- Complete the evaluation within 40 school days after the referral
- Set up the staffing and the IEP/IFSP meeting to go over results of the evaluation and make plans for our child's next steps

Questions To Ask during the Evaluation

- What will be done and why?
- What information can the team expect to learn?
- What does our family hope to learn about our child?
- May a family member be present when our child is tested?
- How can we help?

What areas are included in the "comprehensive" evaluation?

Hearing and vision

Health and medical history

Developmental history

Thinking and problem solving (cognitive behavior)

Talking, listening and understanding (communication)

Movement of small and large muscles (fine motor; gross motor)

Self-care skills (adaptive behavior)

Getting along with others (social-emotional behavior)

Other members of the multidisciplinary team will work with you to schedule evaluation activities. These activities may take place in your home, at child care or at an early childhood center.

- ❑ **Records from Infant-Toddler Services were reviewed**
- ❑ **Information from our family was considered**
- ❑ **Evaluation by the multidisciplinary team was completed within 40 school days**
- ❑ **The staffing and the IEP/IFSP meeting were scheduled**

checklist

Step 4: The Staffing

After the evaluation is completed, the team will meet to discuss the results. This meeting is called the staffing. As a member of the team you will be asked, along with others, to add your signature to the summary of the evaluation. If you, as a parent, do not agree with the professional opinions, steps can be taken to obtain an independent evaluation. Results of the evaluation will be used to determine your child's eligibility for services.

If your child is eligible for Early Childhood Special Education, information from the evaluation will be used to develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Some school districts continue during the preschool years to use an IFSP similar to what you have known in Infant-Toddler Services. The IEP/IFSP may be written at the time of the staffing or at any time during the next 30 days. (In this workbook, the IEP/IFSP meeting will be held at a later time, but procedures vary.)

If your child is not eligible for Early Childhood Special Education, your family may be interested in participating in other early childhood services in the community. Many communities offer programs with enriching social and language experiences for young children. Members of the team will share information about such programs in your community.

"John and I have three children with special needs. When our older son entered the special education preschool, I didn't know what to expect. I was uncertain about the staff and the whole IEP process.

Goals? They asked me what goals I wanted! But when our second son entered, we were much more relaxed. We liked the teachers and the speech therapist, we knew what was important to us about his education, and we knew we could handle all the necessary meetings. I think that our calmer manner helped our child. This year he is in a Head Start/ECSE program.

"You have to have a very open mind about all of this. It can be hard to think about your child being in special education. But the teachers really care. They will help you discover abilities that you didn't know your child had—and what the next steps are and how you can get there. They will also help you appreciate abilities that you have as a parent that you don't recognize or appreciate about yourself. Goodness knows, that's important!

"The most important thing is for parents to know what you want for your child. What goals do you have? What do you want him or her to be like as a teenager or an adult? You know your child better than anyone else. That's why the goals you suggest for the IEP are so important. Together with the other people on the team, you can then decide how to reach them.

"John and I never take for granted anything that our children accomplish. Every step is a milestone that we celebrate—so many people work to make the progress happen. The latest news is that our youngest child—our daughter who's had an IFSP almost since birth—is not going to qualify for special education services in preschool. It's good that the infant-toddler staff is helping us deal with this transition too."

Linda Stack, Salina

What options should we consider if our child is not eligible for special education services?

Head Start

Community preschools and child care centers

Community recreation programs

Library story hours

Moms' morning out programs

Cooperative play groups

While these programs are the parents' responsibility if the child is not eligible for special education services, service providers can help families locate information about funding and scholarships.

During the Staffing...

Our family will —

- Bring along a friend or relative, if we choose
- Ask any questions
- Participate in making decisions about eligibility and future steps

Infant Toddler Services staff will —

- Support our family during this transition step
- Participate in making decisions about eligibility and future steps
- Assist our family in finding community services if our child is not eligible for special education services

Early Childhood Special Education staff will —

- Schedule the staffing with our family at least 10 days before it is to occur
- Share results of the evaluation
- Support our family during this transition step
- Participate in making decisions about eligibility and future steps
- Explain the next step in the transition process for eligible children: developing the IEP/IFSP

Checklist

- ❑ The staffing was scheduled 10 days in advance
- ❑ The team met to discuss evaluation results
- ❑ Eligibility for special education was decided
- ❑ Plans for the IEP/IFSP meeting or other community services were discussed

Step 5: Getting Ready for the IEP/IFSP Meeting

Sometimes the IEP/IFSP meeting is held immediately after the staffing. At other times, it is held later but within the next 30 days. Either way, the IEP/IFSP meeting will be a significant event for your child and family. Those who know the child best have an important role in developing the individualized plan. Taking time to prepare for this role will make a difference in the educational services developed for your child.

The purpose of the IEP/IFSP meeting is to develop an Individualized Education Program. All of the observations and assessments that have been carried out by family members and professionals will be put to practical use. Goals will be written to reflect the team's aims for your child. Activities, including therapies, to reach those goals will be planned. Decisions will be made about the services the child will receive and where he or she will go to get them. Family members, along with Infant-Toddler Services and Early Childhood Special Education staff, contribute to these decisions. Family members are likely to be asked to describe the child's current development, along with what you wish him or her to learn during the next year.

How can we prepare for the IEP/IFSP meeting?

Talk with relatives and friends about your hopes for your child and family.

Imagine an "ideal" day for your child, and consider what steps should be taken to make it happen.

Use the chart on page 11.

To Prepare for the IEP/IFSP Meeting...

Our family will —

- Be ready to tell what our child is doing now
- Consider possible goals and objectives for the IEP or outcomes for the IFSP
- Consider inviting a relative or friend to go to the IEP/IFSP meeting with us

Infant Toddler Services staff will —

- Answer questions our family may have
- Consider possible goals and objectives for the IEP or outcomes for the IFSP

Early Childhood Special Education staff will —

- Answer questions from our family
- Consider possible goals and objectives for the IEP or outcomes for the IFSP
- Choose a date for the IEP/IFSP meeting at our family's convenience and invite us by letter at least 10 days in advance

"I'm proud of my son and our family because we have survived the numerous transitions—from neonatal intensive care unit to home, early intervention to preschool and preschool to primary school. I realize that we have more transitions to go, but I'm confident that they will go well. I no longer feel intimidated by the process."

Johnson County parent

A Look at My Child's Development

Area of development		Some things I would like my child to learn in this area
Play — sharing, taking turns, playing by self and with others		
Language — sharing needs, following directions, listening, concepts such as up, down, in, on		
Dressing — taking clothes off and on, zipping, buttoning		
Toileting — sitting on or standing at a potty, time scheduling, toilet training, wiping		
Reading — looking at pictures, listening to stories, favorite characters		
Meals — eating with utensils, eating variety of foods, table manners		
Thinking — cause and effect, colors, sorting, solving problems, counting		
Moving — walking, running, coloring, building with blocks, playing ball		
Other — please list		

- ❑ Our family and Infant-Toddler Services and Early Childhood Special Education staff considered possible goals for our child
- ❑ The IEP/IFSP meeting was scheduled, and our family was notified by letter at least 10 days in advance.
- ❑ Our family received the invitation.

Checklist

Step 6: IEP/IFSP Meeting

The IEP/IFSP meeting brings together the family and service providers to put shared goals into writing. Some of the faces will be very familiar to the family, while others may be new.

Family members are a very important part of this IEP/IFSP team. You will be given opportunities to express your opinions about your child's current activities and your hopes for him or her in the coming year. The team will also ask you what activities you would like your child to work on during the next year (for example, zipping a jacket or playing with other children). These activities will be called goals and objectives. The goals chosen for your child should fit into your everyday routines and help your child to become more independent in learning and activities of daily living. Together IEP/IFSP team members will decide:

- the goals and objectives with the highest priority
- which therapy, transportation and other services are needed in order to reach those goals
- where the child should be enrolled (or served at home) to meet the goals

When team members agree upon these issues, the plan will be put into writing, forming your child's Individualized Education Program. Everyone present will sign the plan, you'll be given a copy, and then the plan can be carried out. Parents will also be asked to sign a form called Consent for Placement in Special Education. In some communities, the written planning form continues to be called an IFSP as in Infant-Toddler Services. Ask your special education staff how this form is the same and how it differs from what you have signed in the past.

Sign these documents only if you fully understand and agree with them. Meetings can be halted and rescheduled if families have questions or reservations about any of the services proposed.

My Child's IEP Team

Name	Area of Specialty	Phone

At the IEP/IFSP Meeting...

Our family will —

- Describe our child's present and anticipated activities
- Share ideas for goals and objectives
- Discuss possibilities for services and placement
- After agreement is reached, sign the IEP/IFSP and the Consent for Placement in Special Education

Infant-Toddler Services staff will —

- Share ideas for goals and objectives
- Discuss options for services and placement
- After agreement is reached, sign the IEP/IFSP

Early Childhood Special Education staff will —

- Schedule and host the meeting
- Share ideas for goals and objectives
- Discuss options for services and placement
- As agreement is reached, put the IEP/IFSP into writing
- Sign the plan and prepare to carry it out

"Although it sounds odd, it was a comfort that the center-based staff seemed nervous at times about my son's challenges. It was, however, their attention to detail and their willingness to ask my opinions or preferences that helped us all through our anxiety."

Harvey County mother

Each community has different possibilities for places where Early Childhood Special Education services can be provided. Here are a few of them:

Child care center
Head Start
Public or private preschool
Family child care
Even Start
Child's home
Clinic
Babysitter's home
Cooperative play group
Title 1 preschool
Therapeutic classroom
Hospital

At the Transition Meeting about three months prior to your child's third birthday, the team should have discussed possible locations for your child to receive Early Childhood Special Education. You may have visited some of them.

By law...

...your child's placement must occur in the least restrictive environment (LRE) where the child's goals can be met. Early Childhood Special Education may need to provide some additional adult assistance, training for the staff, changes in surroundings or equipment, or specially chosen materials in order to help your child learn in the place selected. Placement must be based on the child's needs, and it must be a team decision. The time for making this decision is at the IEP/IFSP conference.

Checklist

- ❑ The IEP/IFSP meeting was held
- ❑ Discussion and decision-making included our family, Infant-Toddler Services and Early Childhood Special Education staff
- ❑ Agreement was reached, and the IEP/IFSP was written
- ❑ All present signed the IEP/IFSP
- ❑ The family signed the Consent for Placement

Step 7: Putting the IEP/IFSP Into Action

Writing an IEP/IFSP that truly meets your child's needs is an important accomplishment for you and the other members of the team. Now it's time to put the plan into action. This is an exciting time of new beginnings for your child and your family. As with anything new, many questions will arise, and decisions will need to be made. It's important for you and other members of your IEP/IFSP team to face these issues together, share information and make decisions that are in the best interests of your child.

What issues might we consider?

Health records and immunizations

Transportation

Special equipment

Medications

Special diet

Staff orientation or training

Other issues may include planning for your child's first days in the new program and finding ways to make those transitional days happy and successful. This may require trial visits to the new classroom, sample bus rides or bringing a familiar toy from home.

The key to assuring a good beginning is close communication among all who know and care for your child: your family, Infant-Toddler Services and Early Childhood Special Education staff, and others your child sees regularly. As you talk together, you will think of many creative ideas to help your child enjoy the step ahead. If problems arise, they too can be discussed in an atmosphere of openness and respect.

Questions Families May Ask About the New Program

Can my child visit the new school with me?

Are there toddler groups for entering 3-year-olds?

Can we do a trial run on the school bus?

What supplies will my child need?

How are food and snacks handled?

Does the teacher understand the times when my child needs special help?

When and how does the teacher prefer to communicate with parents?

What activities are there for families at the new program?

What supplies should we provide?

Questions Children May Ask

Who are all these people?

Can my mom stay with me for awhile?

Can I play with all these toys?

Can I bring my blanket to school?

What if I get tired or hungry?

Who will help me?

To Put the IEP into Action...

Our family will —

- Ask questions and be open to new ideas
- Help staff at the new program understand our child
- Communicate with our child's former and present caregivers about helping him or her be happy and successful in the new program
- Help our child feel excited and confident about this transition

Infant-Toddler Services staff will —

- Ask questions and be open to new ideas
- Share information with our family and the new program
- Help our child anticipate the new program

Early Childhood Special Education staff will —

- Ask questions and be open to new ideas
- Arrange for the IEP/IFSP to be carried out
- Consider our family's needs in making decisions
- Communicate with our family and staff from Infant-Toddler Services
- Welcome our child and our family

"We're on our way!"
Concordia parent

"Everybody had done their best to help us understand and participate. The placement choice was a good one that fit our family's values. It felt very natural."
Northeast Kansas parent

At this point...

... you have worked through the transition process. Your child has stepped ahead from Infant-Toddler Services to Early Childhood Special Education services or another pre-kindergarten arrangement. These new beginnings have probably affected everyone in your family.

You have practiced ways of transition planning that you can use again in the future. As you work closely with other people who also care about your child, you find them to be competent and concerned and you begin to trust them with your family's values and hopes. All transitions are more successful when families and service providers work through the process together, sharing their views of the child, their understandings of the law and their creative ideas, which can help to make "appropriate education" a reality for every child and family.

- ❑ Our child made the transition from Infant-Toddler Services to Early Childhood Special Education services or to another pre-kindergarten arrangement
- ❑ We worked together to resolve any issues that arose
- ❑ All are continuing to communicate during this time of change

Check Us!

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Parental Rights

The law says ...

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides parents with certain rights related to services for a child with a developmental delay or disability. It is very important for parents or guardians to be fully aware of these rights. If at any point you are uncertain about your rights, please ask questions of your school district. Other sources of information are listed below. Do not sign any agreement until you understand what it means for your child. In brief, your rights under IDEA-Part B (for children ages 3-21) include the following:

Written Consent - You must agree in writing before the school evaluates and/or serves your child in special education.

Parent Participation - You must be consulted about your child's educational program and encouraged to participate in creating it. Meetings must be scheduled at times convenient for you to attend. Communication must be in your native language.

Educational Evaluation - There is no cost to you for the evaluation. Parents have a right to have an independent evaluation in addition to the one provided by the school district staff.

Records - You may examine and receive copies of all your child's records.

Confidentiality of Information - The information filed and used by the school district regarding your child must be kept confidential.

Due Process - If you and the school district cannot agree on the evaluation, the identification, the placement or the provision of a free and appropriate public education for your child, both you and the school have the right to request a hearing to settle this difference of opinion.

Sources of Information about Parental Rights

Special Education Director	_____
Local Parent Group	_____
Make A Difference Information Network	1-800-332-6262
Families Together, Topeka	1-800-264-6343
Kansas Advocacy & Protective Services (KAPS)	1-800-432-8276

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Additional copies of *STEP AHEAD* may be obtained from the Make a Difference Information Network, 800-332-6262; Infant-Toddler Services, 913-296-6135; Kansas State Board of Education, 913-296-7453; or Bridging Early Services Transition Project Outreach, 316-241-7754.